

# Superpower by Invitation: Late Cold War Diplomacy and Leveraging Armenian Terrorism as a Means to Rapprochement in Israeli-Turkish Relations (1980–7)

## Abstract

*This article puts forth the argument that Israel's desire to repair its deteriorating relations with Turkey between 1980 and 1985 drove Israeli diplomats to leverage Armenian terrorism as an issue of shared concern with Turkey. Specifically, Armenian terrorism's apparent affiliation with a similar brand of Palestinian terrorism, which was supported by the Soviet Union, was used to court Turkey. This overlooked factor also provides a template with which to understand Israel's policy on the contested memories of the Armenian Genocide during the 1980s. In the context of a late Cold War superpower rivalry, this article demonstrates how Israeli diplomats assigned the US to mediate between Ankara and Jerusalem. This context highlights the degree to which Cold War dynamics were two-sided: how regional powers such as Israel attempted to influence the policies of the superpower US in the later Cold War years through leveraging global terrorism for diplomatic gains with Turkey.*

Keywords: Cold War, ASALA, Israel, Turkey, leverage, terror

## Introduction

The Israeli-Turkish relations have been the focus of much attention from generations of historians.<sup>1</sup> Within this extensive literature, some themes have been the focus of particular attention, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the question of Jerusalem

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<sup>1</sup>To mention only a few in this rapidly growing literature: Baruch Gilad, 'Our Neighbors: Turkey and Cyprus', in *Ministry of Foreign Affairs – the First Fifty Years*, eds. Moshe Yegar, Yosef Govrin, Arye Oded (Jerusalem: Ketter Publishing, 2002), 371–77; Raphael Israeli, 'The Land of Many Crossroads The Turkish-Israeli Odd Couple', *Orbis* 45, no. 1 (2001): 65–79.

and the occupied territories, energy, military and economic cooperation.<sup>2</sup> Further, both countries have for several decades now had to deal with terrorism perpetrated by ethno-nationalist movements. Turkey, for instance, has been suffering terrorist attacks, mainly by the PKK, but also by radical left-wing terrorist groups and in the last decade fundamentalist Islamic terrorism.<sup>3</sup> Israel, meanwhile, has been dealing with terrorist problems of its own over the years, both within Israel and abroad on Israeli and Jewish targets worldwide, primarily by Palestinian nationalist movements.<sup>4</sup> When one closely examines this extensive literature, however, this issue has rarely been problematised in the context of Israeli-Turkish relations and, specifically, the Cold War superpower rivalry and its Middle Eastern context.<sup>5</sup> The impact of the Armenian terrorism of the 1970s and 1980s on Israeli-Turkish relations is an especially understudied avenue in this literature. This article demonstrates the impact of Armenian-Palestinian terrorism on Israeli-Turkish relations.

The innovative argument this article puts forth is that Israel's desire to repair its deteriorating relations with Turkey between 1980 and 1985 drove Israeli diplomats to leverage Armenian terrorism, specifically the activities of the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA), as a concern shared with Turkey. Hence, Israeli diplomats used Armenian terrorism, and its apparent affiliation with a similar brand of Palestinian terrorism, as a diplomatic tool. Furthermore, to solidify this strategy, Israeli diplomats used the tripartite Israeli-Turkish-United States relationship, especially the argument that good Israeli-Turkish relations and cooperation against the

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<sup>2</sup>See for example: George E. Gruen, 'Turkey's Relations with Israel and Its Arab Neighbors: The Impact of Basic Interests and Changing Circumstances', *Middle East Review* 17, no. 3 (1985): 33-43; M. Hakan Yavuz, 'Turkish-Israeli Relations through the Lens of the Turkish Identity Debate', *Journal of Palestine Studies* 27, no. 1 (1997): 22-37; and Mohamut Bali Aykan, 'The Palestinian Question in Turkish Foreign Policy From the 1950s to the 1990s', *The International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25, no.1 (1993): 91-110.

<sup>3</sup>For more on this see for instance: Ersel Aydinli and Nihat Ali Ozcan 'The Conflict Resolution and Counterterrorism Dilemma: Turkey Faces its Kurdish Question,' *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23, no. 3 (2011): 438-57.

<sup>4</sup>See for example Ron Schleifer, 'Psyoping Hezbollah: The Israeli Psychological Warfare Campaign During the 2006 Lebanon War', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 21, no. 2 (2009): 221-38; Ariel Merari, 'Israel Facing Terrorism', *Israel Affairs* 11, no.1 (2005): 223-37; and Paul Thomas Chamberlin 'Schönau and the Eagles of the Palestinian Revolution: Refugees, Guerrillas, and Human Rights in the Global 1970s', *Cold War History* 12, no. 4 (2012): 595-614 – to list a few.

<sup>5</sup>For some works that implicitly touch upon earlier periods of the Cold War in the context of the Israeli Turkish relations, although they do not address terror see for example: Roland Popp, 'Accommodating to a working relationship: Arab Nationalism and US Cold War policies in the Middle East, 1958-60', *Cold War History* 10, no. 3 (2010): 397-427; Manolis Koumas, 'Cold War Dilemmas, Superpower Influence, and Regional Interests: Greece and the Palestinian Question, 1947-1949', *Journal of Cold War Studies* 19, no.1 (2017): 99-124.

Soviet threat was in the interests of the Western Bloc, specifically the US. Although the US dimension is mentioned by Israeli diplomats along these lines, the analysis of this article focusses particularly on the Israeli-Turkish angle. Thus, for the most part, the paper assesses the views and the voices of Israeli diplomats from Jerusalem and Ankara.

The article is divided into four main parts. The first part examines Israeli-Turkish diplomatic relations in both a Cold War and Middle Eastern context. Thereafter, the circumstances leading to the crisis in these relations between 1980 and 1985 are assessed. The second part outlines ASALA's terrorist activities between 1973 and 1985. This is followed by a short background on Israel's problems with Palestinian terrorism emerging from Lebanon, which examines what could have driven the Israelis to see Armenian terrorism, specifically ASALA, as their own problem. The third part, meanwhile, provides an in-depth look at Israel's military and diplomatic efforts to court Turkey by leveraging ASALA as a demonstration of Israel's and Turkey's shared concerns in respect to terrorism; specifically, it charts how Israeli diplomats used ASALA's assassinations of Turkish diplomats to portray the two countries as 'brothers in arms' in a shared struggle against terrorism. The last part charts the gradual process of normalisation of relations between Ankara and Jerusalem (1985–7), showing how joining forces against Middle Eastern terrorism led to this diplomatic win for Israel.

### **Situating the Crisis in Israel-Turkey Relations (1980-5) within the Wider Context of the Middle East and the Cold War**

As Geir Lundestad's monumental work 'Empire by Invitation?' (1986) proposed, in the early years of the Cold War, secondary powers such as Western European governments influenced US foreign policy decision-making regarding the integration of Western European countries into the Western Bloc.<sup>6</sup> To complete the 'two dogs chewing on a bone' image of Cold War Sovietisation versus Americanism, the idea of 'the power of the weak' expresses the similar leverage held by the Eastern European countries over the Soviet Union regarding their incorporation into the Eastern Bloc.

Turning to the Middle East, this region has been frequently assessed in the Cold War

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<sup>6</sup>Geir Lundestad, 'Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945-1952', *Journal of Peace Research* 23, no. 3 (1986): 263-77.

context as another important area for superpower rivalry, entailing securing resources, such as oil, from the Arab countries, recruiting regional allies, and monitoring the Israeli-Arab conflict.<sup>7</sup> Apart from these factors, in the two earlier decades of the Cold War the 'chewing bone' image was an applicable image to describe the 1956, 1967 and 1973 conflicts. Subsequently, in the 1970s and 1980s, the 'chewing bone' image was outdated due to the dominance of the Americans and the declining power of the Soviets in the Middle East.

To recap, from the mid-1950s to the end of the 1970s, the US policy in the region was essentially steady, with only slight changes from one administration to another. Securing Israel, reducing the influence of the USSR on Arab radical nationalism and making sure that the Western Bloc maintained its access to the oil resources of the Persian Gulf were the core elements of the US grand strategy during these decades.<sup>8</sup> The Soviets, meanwhile, had a more dynamic approach to their policy towards the Middle East. Although in the 1950s and 1960s the Soviets sought to promote Arab nationalism as an anti-Western strategy, they failed to cement a widespread pro-Soviet shift in the region.<sup>9</sup> In the 1970s the Soviets did not play a major part in the Arab-Israeli peace process which was prompted by the Americans. These developments, among others, marked the US dominance in the Middle East during the 1970s.<sup>10</sup>

Israel and Turkey were both very important actors in the superpowers' battle for Cold War dominance in the Middle East. Turkey, an important NATO member, was the lynchpin stopping the spread of communism towards Southern Europe and the Middle East. Israel, meanwhile, was massively supported by the US with financial aid, arms, and military training and served as a beacon for Western values in the region. By contrast, the Arab countries were trained and supported by the Soviets. In this context, Israeli-Turkish relations were not just a regional factor in the Middle East but vital to the wider Cold War dynamic both within and beyond the region.

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<sup>7</sup>See for example among others, Douglas Little, 'The Cold War in the Middle East: Suez crisis to Camp David Accords' in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, vol. II, eds. Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 305-26.

<sup>8</sup>*ibid.*, 325

<sup>9</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>10</sup>For more on the Soviets' policy failures in Iran and Afghanistan, see *ibid.*, and Amin Saikal 'Islamism, the Iranian revolution, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan', *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, vol. III, eds. Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 112-34.

Lundestad's 'Empire by Invitation?' analysis is potentially applicable to the Israeli rapprochement with Turkey. In the case of this article, according to Lundestad's analysis secondary Cold War powers (Turkey), followed by regional states (Israel), were likely to influence the policies of the superpowers in the Middle East (i.e., the US) for their own selfish diplomatic ends. Although this article addresses the late Cold War period (1980–7), the particularly intense regional dynamics and conflicts mean that one can still articulate international relations in the region in terms of attempts to 'invite' the Americans to meet the strategic diplomatic aims of the secondary or regional powers. Hence, Israeli diplomats sought to use the unwavering opposition of the US to radical left-wing terrorism, driven by anti-Western/Imperialist powers, which both ASALA and Palestinian terrorism exemplified, as a lever to encourage a rapprochement with Ankara.<sup>11</sup>

Turning to the impending crisis, two overlapping factors had driven the deteriorating relationship between Ankara and Jerusalem, threatening the delicate Cold War balance in the Middle East: firstly, Turkey's energy crisis. By the early 1970s the world's energy dependency lay in the hands of the Arab countries as the main energy suppliers. Not surprisingly, this critical advantage was transformed almost immediately into sanctions against Israel's allies.<sup>12</sup> In the context of Israeli-Turkish relations, during most of the 1970s Turkey was facing serious energy problems of its own. Specifically, since the 1973 Yom Kippur War, and, subsequently, the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974, Turkey was regarded with suspicion by the Western Bloc, specifically the US. The latter's embargo pushed Turkey to rely on energy supplies from Arab countries.<sup>13</sup> Following the success of the Arab countries in pressuring African leaders to boycott Israel in the early 1970s, the subsequent target was the Middle East, specifically Turkey.<sup>14</sup> These factors combined to increase the domestic pressure in Turkey from

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<sup>11</sup>For more on the US treatment of Armenian terrorism of the period, see Oleg Kuznetsov 'Armenia, Transnational Terrorism and Global Interests: What Do CIA and DoS Documents Suggest?', *Caucasus International* 5 no. 2 (2015): 47.

<sup>12</sup>For detailed discussion on this, see David Kimhi, 'Israel's Battle Against its Isolation', in *Ministry of Foreign Affairs – the First Fifty Years*, eds. Moshe Yegar, Yosef Govrin, Arye Oded (Jerusalem: Israel, Ketter Publishing, 2002): 66.

<sup>13</sup> See Alon Liel, *Turkey in the Middle East: Oil, Islam and Politics* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1994), 48. Alon Liel evaluates that the energy crisis and Turkey's dependence on Arab countries for fuel was another important factor in downgrading Turkey's relations with Israel.

<sup>14</sup>See Kimhi, 'Israel's Battle Against its Isolation', 66-7.

those who supported a pro-Muslim foreign policy.<sup>15</sup> In 1978–1979 Turkey's energy problems escalated into a full-scale political and financial crisis. Turkey's dependency on its Arab energy suppliers resulted in heavy pressure being exerted on the Turkish government to boycott Israel as part of a pan-Muslim front.

The second factor that underpinned the crisis was the 1980 Jerusalem Law promulgated in the Israeli Knesset (Israel's parliament). That law outlines that the unified Jerusalem is the capital city of Israel, including the territories occupied during the 1967 Six Day War.<sup>16</sup> The Arab world manifested an immediate antigenic and radical response to Israel's aspirations regarding Jerusalem, with one of their main targets being Israeli-Turkish bilateral relations. The governments of Iraq, Libya and Saudi Arabia applied explicit pressure on the then Turkish Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel to cut off all relations with Israel. The Arab countries demanded that Turkey, as a Muslim state, support the Palestinians' battle for independence, and join a pan-Arab coalition against Israel. In response to this pressure, in December 1980 the military coup government led by General Kenan Evren did officially downgrade its relations with Israel from second secretary to the lowest representation rank of the chargé d'affaires level.<sup>17</sup> At the same time as downgrading its relations with Israel, he Turks initiated the establishment of a Palestinian embassy in Ankara in 1980, thereby granting the PLO full recognition.

### **Anti-Western Armenian Terrorism: ASALA Targeting Turkish Diplomats**

In parallel to the two issues outlined above, between 1973 and 1985 a new phenomenon of Armenian terrorism emerged from Beirut. The Marxist-Leninist (and pro-Soviet), ASALA and the national-socialist (and anti-Soviet) Justice Commandos Against Armenian Genocide (JCAG) carried out a series of assassinations of Turkish diplomats

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<sup>15</sup>For work focussing on this aspect of Turkey's foreign policy, see Aykan, 'The Palestinian Question'; and Ulrich W. Haarmann, 'Ideology and History, Identity and Alterity: The Arab Image of the Turk from the Abbasids to Modern Egypt', *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 20, no. 2 (1988): 175–96.

<sup>16</sup>The Jerusalem Law, passed on 30 July 1980 in the Israeli Knesset, defines the legal status of Jerusalem. The law notes that Jerusalem is complete and united as the capital of Israel, including the territories occupied during the Six-Day War of 1967. See the full version of the law at: [http://www.knesset.gov.il/laws/special/eng/basic10\\_eng.htm](http://www.knesset.gov.il/laws/special/eng/basic10_eng.htm) (accessed at 15 May, 2018).

<sup>17</sup>See for example among others, M. Hakan Yavuz, 'Turkish-Israeli Relations through the Lens of the Turkish Identity Debate', *Journal of Palestine Studies* 27, no. 1 (1997): 22–37; and Alexander Murinson 'The Strategic Depth Doctrine of Turkish Foreign Policy', *Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no. 6 (2006): 945–64.



and their family members in Western Europe, North America and Australia. Specifically, the Armenian terrorists focused their efforts and aspirations on three objectives: firstly, vengeance on the Turkish Republic because of the 1915 Genocide, during which approximately 1.5 million Ottoman Armenians were murdered. Subsequently, the second objective was to force the present Turkish Republic to recognise the Genocide committed by the Young Turks: thereby, thirdly, forcing the Turks into making reparations returning the land taken from the Armenian victims.<sup>18</sup>

Given that Middle Eastern Armenians were assassinating Turkish diplomats in an effort to bring their forgotten 1915 Genocide to the world's attention, most other parts of the Armenian diaspora treated their actions as a justifiable use of violence.<sup>19</sup> Israel and Turkey and other Western countries, however, sought to label ASALA as a terrorist organisation for their own national security and diplomatic interests. It is essential, therefore, to define terrorism, and also to understand how the Israelis and Turks defined terrorism in the 1980s. Coming to grips with terrorism is an elusive mission, since forms of terrorism are very broad, and the term is used frequently in public discourse and modern life. Yet, it is possible to identify some basic shared foundations. For instance, the first usage was in the French revolution (1789–1794), and thus terrorism relates to political change which drives the perpetrators to act violently to achieve their goals.<sup>20</sup> This fundamental understanding is evident in the views expressed in the context of Israeli-Turkish relations, specifically in ISA documents between Ankara and Jerusalem which define Armenian terrorism as a means to achieve political change. Namely, the drive of the Armenians in perpetrating violence against Turkey's diplomats was

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<sup>18</sup>For more on this see Paul Wilkinson, 'Armenian Terrorism', *The World Today* 39, no. 9 (1983): 344–50; Francis P. Hyland, *Armenian Terrorism: The Past, the Present, the Prospects* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991); and Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

<sup>19</sup>See for example the excellent short discussion on how the Armenian diaspora treated the terrorists as members of 'memory movements' who were part of Armenian mainstream and as heroes rather than as radical and marginal terrorists; see Yona Waitz, 'Memory in the Shadows of Genocide: The Memory of the Armenian Genocide in the Armenian Community in Jerusalem' (PhD thesis, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2010): 98 [in Hebrew]. According to Razmik Panossian, some of the violence against the Turkish diplomats was aimed at shaking 'Armenians out of their torpid state, and to put the Armenian cause (Genocide recognition and lost lands) back on the agenda of world politics' – Razmik Panossian, *The Armenians From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars* (London: Hurst & Company Publications, 2006): 310;

<sup>20</sup>See Oxford English Dictionary refer to terrorist activity as needing to be perpetrated systematically and carried out by a political party – *The Oxford English Dictionary, Compact Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971): 3,268. For a broad discussion on terrorism definitions see Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 1–42. Hoffman also proposes that the broadest accepted contemporary application of the term terror is its political usage and to gain power.

supplied by political objectives (i.e. for genocide recognition and territorial claims).

The primary focus of this article is on ASALA rather than on JCAG. In fact, as this article shows, JCAG activity is not addressed at all in the reflections of the Israeli diplomats; in the Israeli State Archive (ISA) documents only ASALA is referred to in the context of Armenian terrorism. Arguably, there are two main reasons for this focus among the Israeli diplomats: by contrast to JCAG, ASALA was targeting innocent bystanders and non-Turkish victims on their terrorist attacks, a possible threat to Israelis and Jews worldwide; and the fact that ASALA was aligned with the Soviet Bloc in the Cold War and operating against Western countries. Indeed, ASALA's bombing of the Turkish Airlines desk at Orly Airport in Paris on 15 July 1983 was one of the last attacks perpetrated by Armenian terrorists during this period and among the largest. The bomb killed eight innocent people and wounded more than 90.<sup>21</sup> Arguably – as the assessment of one the documents in the article shows – Israel found solid intelligence evidence connecting ASALA and radical Palestinian terrorists.

It should be noted, however, that in response to the emerging Armenian terrorism, the Turks, far from reassessing their role in the Armenian Genocide of 1915, reinforced their alternative narrative, promoting an alternative historiography of that period, and engaged in vigorous diplomatic advocacy against Armenian claims in international forums to prevent the genocide being acknowledged.<sup>22</sup> This response is described in recent historiographical debates on the Turkish denial of the Armenian Genocide as the 'narrative boom'.<sup>23</sup> Specifically, Ankara had circulated its denial counter-narrative among its Western allies, which asserted that labelling the events of 1915 as genocidal was offensive to Turkey and would stimulate a diplomatic scandal. These aspects of the narrative boom, however, are beyond the scope of this short article. Given, then, that Armenian terrorism was clearly a Turkish problem since the Armenians targeted

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<sup>21</sup>Maxime Gauin 'Remembering the Orly Attack' in *Uluslararası Hukuk ve Politika* Cilt 7, Sayı: 27, (2011): 114

<sup>22</sup>This internationalisation of the Turkish response to the accusations by Armenians are extensively discussed in Fatma Müge Göçek, *Denial of Violence: Ottoman Past, Turkish Present, and victims of the Armenians Collective Violence Against the Armenians, 1789-2009* (Oxford University Press, 2015): 428-56; and Doğan Gürpınar, 'The manufacturing of denial: the making of the Turkish 'official thesis' on the Armenian Genocide between 1974 and 1990', *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 18 no. 3, (2016): 217-40.

<sup>23</sup>Fatma Müge Göçek, 'Reading Genocide: Turkish Historiography on 1915' in *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. R. Suny et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011): 175-98, (49).



Turkish diplomats, and that the Israelis did not have to engage directly with it since ASALA never sought to attack Israeli targets, what then could be the reason for the interest of the Israeli MFA in Armenian terrorism?

### **A Short History: Palestinian Terrorism Emerging from Lebanon**

To answer the question posed above one need to tap into Israel's short history of terrorist problems. For the most part, Israel suffered from Palestinian terrorism, mainly in the form of radical left-wing movements that did not engage with the non-violent path the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) set out on in the late 1970s and 1980s.<sup>24</sup> As in the case of the Armenians, the radical Palestinian terrorist organisations fitted into the basic definition of terror, as in the case of ASALA, in that each aimed to achieve political goals. Subsequently, towards the late 1970s, the PLO split into radical leftist moments, such as George Habash's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), Black September, and Abu Nidal, whose key agenda was to achieve Palestinian nationalist goals by perpetrating violence against Israeli targets, based on the roots of national armed struggle.<sup>25</sup> In an oral interview with Daniel Mokady, Israel's ambassador to the Chelli (1989–93) and the MFA director of the Policy Research Institute, he assesses that the Palestinians were looking for any kind of cooperation, and the Armenians were there and very much open to helping the Palestinians and being helped by them. Both Armenian and Palestinian terror organisations (ASALA and Abu Nidal and Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) were close ideologically and geographically, and Lebanon's government did not resist this terrorism activity.<sup>26</sup>

What should be emphasised in the context of the Israeli-Turkish relations and the focus of the current article are two critical components: firstly, the timeframe of Armenian and Palestinian terror, i.e. the period of the 1970s and 1980s during which these groups perpetrated their violence, which played a distinctive role in Israel's strategy to target ASALA; and secondly, the geopolitical circumstances, i.e. the fact that these terrorist

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<sup>24</sup>The PLO was not a unitary actor but a conglomerate of Palestinian organisations formed initially at the behest of Egypt and taken over by Fatah in 1969, leading eventually to support for a peace process with the backing of the Western Bloc for a two-state solution with Israel. For an excellent analysis of the phases of Palestinian nationalism during 1948–2005, see Helga Baumgarten, 'The Three Faces/Phases of Palestinian Nationalism, 1948–2005', *Journal of Palestine Studies* 34, no. 4, (2005): 25–48, (30–2).

<sup>25</sup>*ibid.*, 27

<sup>26</sup>Oral interview with Daniel Mokady, 30 October 2016, Modiin, Israel

organisations came from the Middle East, specifically Lebanon, which hosted both Armenian and Palestinian terrorists training facilities and headquarters during that period.<sup>27</sup> This serves to chart how Israeli diplomats used ASALA's assassinations to portray the two countries as 'brothers in arms' in a shared struggle against terrorism.

### **1981: Entering the Israeli-Turkish Relations Crisis**

A year after the downgrading of Israeli-Turkish relations to the level of *chargé d'affaires*, a document was prepared by Shlomo Bino, the Israeli MFA official assessing Israeli-Turkish relations up to November 1981, as a background note to the forthcoming visit to Ankara of the American Secretary of State (ASS), Alexander Haig.<sup>28</sup> As Bino noted in his assessment that was important that Haig [ASS] would stress to Ankara the Americans concern about the status of Israeli-Turkish relations. Furthermore, Israel MFA should do anything possible to maintain the relations the way they are now because another worsening will necessarily mean a complete breakdown of the diplomatic relations.<sup>29</sup> 'We receive a cold, and sometimes hostile response, and the Turks do not spare any words to scold the Israelis for their actions [legislation of the Jerusalem law]'.<sup>30</sup> It is a widespread Turkish approach to assess that the downgrading of the relations between Israel and Turkey has been in the interests of the West, specifically, Europe and US. The Western silence helped the Turks to ignore the outcomes of their policy against Israel, disregarding the fact that good relations with Israel were fundamentally important to the Western Bloc. 'It is extremely important, therefore, that the Ankara will acknowledge that the highest American politicians show concern about the stagnant Israeli-Turkish relations, otherwise the Turks will continue to assess the American non-response as an acknowledgment.'<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Some works in the field of terrorism and political violence have been focusing on the interconnections between Palestinian and Armenian terrorists of that period. This warrants a discrete study of its own; see for example: Wilkinson, 'Armenian Terrorism'; Hyland, *Armenian Terrorism*; Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*.

<sup>28</sup>At the time, this document was written by Alexander Haig, the then US Secretary of State (1981–1982). Previously, Haig was the Deputy National Security Advisor under Henry Kissinger, before acting as Supreme Allied Commander of NATO forces in Europe (1974–1979).

<sup>29</sup>*Jerusalem to Washington DC, Re: Assessment of Current Bilateral Relations with Turkey and Background Information to the American Secretary of State in Turkey*, 10 December 1981, ISA/MFA, 00038OP

<sup>30</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>31</sup>*ibid.*

This document reveals the extent of anxiety among Israeli officials that the stagnant relations between Israel and Turkey could potentially deteriorate even further to a complete breakdown. More importantly, it indicates how the Israeli diplomats sought to use the Ankara-Jerusalem conflict and situate it within the wider Cold War conflict for their diplomatic needs. Specifically, given the circumstances of the Turkish energy crisis and its resultant closer ties with the Arab world, Turkey's foreign policy during that specific period was closer to neutral affinity in the Cold War superpower rivalry; therefore, Bino and the MFA were troubled by Turkey's neutrality and addressed Israeli-Turkish relations as that course of action was, the latter noted, in 'the interests of the West'. The decision to approach Alexander Haig was not only because he was the US Secretary of State at the time and thus had access to the highest echelons of Turkey's government but also because, as the former NATO Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, he also had close ties with Turkey's army generals.<sup>32</sup> These were definitely an important political force in Turkey at that time, and therefore could help the Israeli diplomats deliver their messages to the Turkish leadership.<sup>33</sup> Approaching Turkey via Haig was a clever move for Israel's MFA because Turkey's coup d'état (September 1980–November 1983) put Turkey's executive forces in the hands of the army generals and thus approaching these generals was the primary Israeli objective. In a first-hand account, Turkey's veteran diplomat, and Ankara's ambassador to Israel 2009–10, Oğuz Çelikkol, recalls that Haig and Kissinger were well respected among Turkey's diplomatic and army elite. Both had a profound understanding of Turkey's interests in the Cyprus crisis of 1974, and had given Turkish diplomats open door to their offices during that period.<sup>34</sup>

## 1982: First Lebanon War

### *Leveraging ASALA as a Means to Rapprochement in Israeli-Turkish Relations*

In two research reports for use by Israeli diplomats and written by Israeli MFA officials, the interconnections between ASALA and factions of extreme Palestinian terrorism are

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<sup>32</sup>For more on the close engagement between Turkey's military, civil society and political establishment see, for instance: Nilüfer Narlı, 'Concordance and Discordance in Turkish Civil-Military Relations, 1980–2002', *Turkish Studies* 12, no. 2 (2011): 215-25; and Murat Kasapsaraçoğlu 'Harmonization of Turkey's Political, Economic, and Military Interests in the 1950s: Reflections on Turkey's Middle East Policy', *Turkish Studies*, 16, No.3 (2015), 332-348 –to mention a few.

<sup>33</sup>For more on Haig's position as the Supreme Allied Commander of NATO forces in Europe, see Harvey Sicherman 'Patriot: Alexander M. Haig, Jr.', *Orbis* 54, no. 3, (2010): 339-55.

<sup>34</sup>Oral Interview with Oğuz Çelikkol, Istanbul, Turkey, 21 July 2017

heavily stressed. The reports highlight that during 1978 ASALA's leadership confirmed that during a press conference in Beirut that they had close relations with Palestinian terrorist organisations. The MFA was notified from several sources that ASALA was being trained by PFLP members George Habash, Ahmed Jibril and Nayef Hawatmeh, who supplied arms and revolutionary propaganda.<sup>35</sup> Most of the cooperation between ASALA and the PFLP was undertaken in Lebanon, which was home to more than 200,000 Armenians, although other interconnections between ASALA and Palestinian terrorism were brokered through Fatah.<sup>36</sup> The report also stated 'during November 1980 two Palestinian terrorists holding Lebanese and Syrian passports were arrested by the Geneva police. They testified that they had been sent to perpetrate violence for ASALA'.<sup>37</sup> In this particular example, the Palestinians were working for the Armenians; however, there were other cross-fertilisation activities. According to the French authorities, ASALA terrorists were involved in the murder of the Dueks, a French Jewish couple who worked as travel agents, on 23 November 1981 in Paris. The Beretta guns used in this attack had an identical serial number as those used to murder the Turkish consul in Paris.<sup>38</sup>

These research reports underpin the interconnections the Israeli MFA chose to outline for the Israeli diplomats. By using several discrete examples, the Israelis proved, at least partially, the close engagement between Armenian and Palestinian terror as was discussed briefly in the outset of the article. Specifically, the title of the document '*Palestinian-Armenian terror*' itself also implies how the Israelis sought to introduce the connections between Palestinian and Armenian terror to the Turkish diplomats.

In early June 1982, Mr. Ekurt Akbay, the administrative attaché of the Turkish embassy in Lisbon, was killed by Armenian terrorists. His wife was also shot and passed away a few months later as a result of her wounds.<sup>39</sup> At this time, Alon Liel, the Israeli chargé d'affaires in Ankara (1981–1983) sought to reach out to the Turks and offer some condolences in their fight against Armenian terrorism. Liel wrote to İlhan Öztürk, the Turkish Foreign Minister at the time, that Israel would like to show its deepest condolences upon the assassination of Mr. Akbay, administrative attaché in the embassy of Turkey in Portugal. Israel said that it

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<sup>35</sup>Jerusalem to Ankara, Washington DC, London, et al., 15 June 1982, 657, ISA/MFA, 00033ZB

<sup>36</sup>Ankara to Jerusalem, 15 June 1982, 695, ISA/MFA, 00033ZB

<sup>37</sup>ibid.

<sup>38</sup>ibid.

<sup>39</sup>For more detailed account of that event, see Göçek, *Denial of Violence*, 446.

condemned this and previous cold-blooded murders and hoped that the civilised world would join hands in fighting international terrorism.<sup>40</sup>

Subsequently, Alon Liel reported to the MFA in Jerusalem that Öztürk had replied to his condolence letter. Ordinarily, Liel wrote, only administrators in the Turkish MFA replied to me, but in this case Öztürk replied directly to stress his appreciation of our need to join forces to fight back against international terror.<sup>41</sup> Öztürk noted that, 'Turkey would be interested in cooperation with Israel in this specific area'.<sup>42</sup>

Arguably, Öztürk reply could have been assessed as a good sign of possible future cooperation. Israel may have overstated the significance of this, however; Öztürk's response, although polite, offers little specific detail as to the nature of any proposed collaboration between Ankara and Jerusalem.

### *Implementing the 'Brothers in Arms' Agenda*

An attempt to assassinate Israel's ambassador in London (1979–82), Shlomo Argov, led to the Knesset decision, on 4 June 1982, to invade Southern Lebanon in order to secure Israel's northern border, and this conflict soon escalated into a full-scale war.<sup>43</sup> Since this occurred during the midst of the crisis in Israeli-Turkish relations, Israel was dealing with two Middle Eastern fronts: first, national security problems in terms of securing its northern borders, and Jewish and Israeli institutions against Palestinian terror; and second, the deteriorating relations with Turkey which could yet deteriorate to a point of complete breakdown. Accordingly, because of Turkey's close relations with the Arab countries as their energy suppliers and the resultant pressure to boycott Israel, the Turks did not cooperate with Israel's invasion of Lebanon, although the two countries had mutual interests in uprooting anti-Turkish and anti-Israeli terrorist organisations from Northern Lebanon.

To demonstrate the last point, a document signed by Alon Liel notes that during his last meeting with Turkish MFA official Elykim Kirzfa, the latter proposed that Ankara is

<sup>40</sup>Liel to Öztürk, Ankara, 8 June, 1982, 695, ISA/MFA, 00030TJ

<sup>41</sup>Report, 29 April 1982, 8364/1, ISA/MFA, 00033ZB

<sup>42</sup>Öztürk to Liel, Ankara, 9 June, 1982, 695, ISA/MFA, 00030TJ

<sup>43</sup>Immediately after the Argov assassination attempt, the Israeli Knesset approved the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) to enter Southern Lebanon to secure the northern border of Israel. The operation entitled Operation Peace for Galilee or Mivtsa Sheleg [in Hebrew] is a synonym for the first Lebanon War. See Israel's Israel Cabinet Decision, 6 June 1982 to launch the operation:

<http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/MFADocuments/Yearbook6/Pages/3%20Israel%20Cabinet%20Decision-%206%20June%201982.aspx>, (accessed 5 April, 2018).

'open for interesting suggestions' regarding the issue of combatting Armenian terrorism.<sup>44</sup> Specifically, Liel said that 'I, [Liel] had a counter proposition that the Israeli MFA could share with Ankara our expertise from our recent investigations of the Argov assassination attempt and against our late diplomat Yaacov Bar-Simantov [who was murdered in Paris in April 1982]. We can translate those documents into English, but we need your [MFA] approval first'.<sup>45</sup> Liel concluded the document by addressing the task of managing Israeli-Turkish expectations, arguing that four months earlier Turkey had founded a special unit to combat Armenian terrorism. Karifa responded, noting very clearly that, 'our [Israel's] motivation to help them with uprooting Armenian terrorism can greatly impact the future of our relations'.<sup>46</sup>

This document is another valuable reflection of the tense state of Israeli-Turkish relations, with the Israelis attempting to court Turkey on the basis of knowledge sharing, proposing a mutual agenda as 'brothers in arms' against terrorism.<sup>47</sup> One can evaluate that there was a shared recognition that the assassinations of diplomats perpetrated by the PFLP on Israeli targets and those perpetrated by ASALA on Turkish targets used the same terrorist methods, betraying the close affiliation of those two groups in Lebanon. In other words, Ankara could use the Israelis' expertise in understanding how these assassinations were planned and executed, in the expectation that this would be useful in combatting ASALA. The Israelis, by contrast, could have benefitted by communicating in concrete terms that Palestinian terrorism was closely linked to that of ASALA. Contextualising these to the looming First Lebanon War, this subtly encourages the Turks to soft-pedal on any inclination (whether from domestic or international Muslim/Arab opinion) to be too critical of Israeli actions in Lebanon.

Liel further elaborates in an oral interview on the military/diplomatic measures undertaken by Israel. Turning to the cooperation between the Palestinian terror organisations and ASALA, in June 1982 Israel demolished Palestinian and ASALA training facilities in Southern Lebanon. Israel thereby hoped to regain Turkey's trust by disrupting ASALA operations in Lebanon. IDF also retrieved 28 files on Armenian terrorists. Israel could have forwarded these directly from the IDF to the Turkish Army

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<sup>44</sup>Ankara to Istanbul, 15 June 1982, 690, ISA/MFA, 00030TJ

<sup>45</sup>ibid.

<sup>46</sup>ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Ankara to Jerusalem, 9 June 1982, 681, ISA/MFA, 00033ZB



or from the Mossad to the Turkish National Intelligence Organisation (MIT). The MFA, however, wished to get diplomatic credit from these files. Therefore, Liel approached Oukaty Gezrdesh, who was the Turks' pivot man managing the operation against ASALA and delivered the files personally to him. Liel reports that Gezrdesh took the files and studied them in depth, but never thanked him: 'Nevertheless, it was clear to us [Israel] that fighting the regional terror was a joint Israeli-Turkish interest.'<sup>48</sup>

A few months after the Argov assassination attempt, more evidence of a possible link between Palestinian and Armenian terrorist activities emerged; this time from London. The Israeli diplomat Michael Pelled wrote to Jerusalem that a senior British consul contacted him to report that on 9 September 1982 Zeven Bedross, a member of ASALA, was arrested in London with three other members of the organisation. He was armed with a gun and other explosives, and the terrorists were planning to assassinate the Turkish ambassador in London. In a Cold War context, the British authorities were now very concerned that ASALA would plan a retaliatory attack against UK interests in North America, Western Europe or the Middle East, and they were therefore asking for any information or evaluation that Israel might hold on ASALA.<sup>49</sup>

In summary, drawing together the last three sections of Liel's diplomatic activity with the survey of the historical circumstances of the Israel-Turkey bilateral crisis, it is evident that while the diplomatic crisis had put Israel in a defensive position, one of its strategies for reproaching Ankara was to leverage its intelligence about ASALA as a means of regaining favour with the Turks, while also emphasising the links between Armenian and Palestinian terrorism to encourage Turkey to soft-pedal criticism of Israeli actions in Lebanon and reiterating the shared nature of the terrorist threat each faced, not least in respect to the anti-Western, Soviet-supported, element of that threat. This Cold War dimension will now be explored further.

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<sup>48</sup>Oral interview with Alon Liel, 3 September 2015, Jerusalem, Israel; Ankara to Jerusalem, re: Armenian Terrorism, 19 August 1982, 2365, ISA/MFA, 0003676. With respect to Liel's oral account, Oleg Kuznetsov has argued recently (2015) in his work, based on retrieved CIA documents, that 'The achievements of IDF in southern Lebanon and Beirut in 1982 led to the destruction and uprooting of the existing infrastructure of Armenian terrorism'. See Kuznetsov, 'Armenia, Transnational Terrorism', 47.

<sup>49</sup>London to Jerusalem, Re: Intensifying Security to the British Embassy, 12 September 1982, ISA/MFA, 0003676

## **1983: Cold War Continuities in the Middle Eastern Context and Netanyahu-Kissinger Meeting**

In a Cold War Middle Eastern context, the stagnant Israeli-Turkish relations remained a focus of considerable concern within the Israeli MFA. To address this, the MFA was operating behind the scenes, using sub-state actors to promote the renewal of the Israeli-American-Turkish alliance. In this context there were a number of telegrams between Hanan Bar-On, Deputy General Manager of the Israeli MFA (1979–87) and Benjamin Netanyahu, Deputy Chief of Mission at the Israeli Embassy in Washington, DC, (1982–4) regarding this issue. Bar-On wrote 'Dear "Bibi", on the eve of Mr. Kissinger's trip to Israel and his stopover in Turkey, please address the following issues regarding Israel-Turkey bilateral relations. Dr Kissinger's views are very important to Turkey.<sup>50</sup> Bar-On further noted that during 1974 and the US arms embargo, Kissinger actually defended Ankara from further antagonistic measures from the US administration and encouraged Netanyahu to argue that the stagnant relations between Israel and Turkey, initiated by Ankara, were extremely harmful to Israel, Turkey and the United States.<sup>51</sup>

Bar-On continues that both countries were suffering from terrorist organisations operating against them with the full support of the Soviet Union and the Arab nations in the Middle East. Nevertheless, Ankara's treatment of the PLO as a legitimate power and its support for the establishment of a Palestinian state helps to drive Palestinian and international terrorism. Bar-On argued that the connection between the PLO and anti-Turkish terrorism [ASALA] was well known, and that the Lebanon War had demonstrated this.<sup>52</sup> Netanyahu replied briefly to Bar-On that his outline was very clear and that the Israeli embassy in Washington DC was planning to initiate a meeting between Kissinger and the Israeli ambassador in Washington DC (Meir Rozen, 1983–7) prior to Kissinger's trip.<sup>53</sup>

These telegrams undoubtedly demonstrate Israeli recurring problems with Ankara. Combining these documents with the earlier attempts to approach Alexander Haig in late 1981, it is clear that there is a pattern in which Israel was seeking to approach high-

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<sup>50</sup>Jerusalem to the Embassy in Washington, DC, Re: Dr Henry Kissinger's Visit to Turkey, 5 June 1983, ISA/MFA, 0003679, 1

<sup>51</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>52</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>53</sup>Bibi to Bar-On, Re: Kissinger, 7 June 1983, ISA/MFA, 0003679

ranking personnel in the American administration with a professional record that was respected by both parties to act as intermediaries on their behalf, and that a key supporting argument to gain the support of these intermediaries – and one to be relayed to the Turks – was that good relations between Israel and Turkey were in the interests of the Western Bloc and, specifically, the US.

## **1985–7: The Normalisation of Israeli-Turkish Relations**

### ***Turkey's 'Narrative Boom' and the Armenian Genocide in Late Cold War Context***

From 1983, following the destruction of the ASALA bases in Lebanon, there was some relief in the terrorist activities undertaken by the group. This led in 1985 to a new way forward, supported by a number of Middle Eastern and geopolitical factors that also contributed to the developing normalisation of Israeli-Turkish relations.

By early 1985, the First Lebanon War was in its final stages due to severe pressure within Israeli society to end the war, especially from the liberal parties and Israeli human rights activists. The criticism came about as a result, especially, of the bad reputation following the Sabra and Shatila massacre in September 1983, and the fact that the IDF had lost 654 combatants during the war.<sup>54</sup> On the Israeli-Turkish front, since 1983, the new (civil) Prime Minister, Turgut Özal, had applied a pro-Western economic policy and, therefore, in 1985 Turkey's economic condition had improved, meaning that Turkey was less dependent on the mercy of the Arab world for oil.<sup>55</sup> The Turkish economic rehabilitation, along with declining intensity of the Lebanon war in 1985, prompted Turkey to gradually improve its relations with Israel.

Apart from ASALA, which had an important role in the Israeli-Turkish rapprochement, few other late Cold War factors underpinning the Armenian issue were driving Turkey's 'narrative boom',<sup>56</sup> thus fostering normalisation between Ankara and Jerusalem. Firstly, including some overlap with the Armenian terror years, between 1978 and 1988 the US

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<sup>54</sup>Among many works on this topic for example Aharon Bregman, *Israel's Wars: A History Since 1947*, (London: Routledge, 2002). The Sabra and Shatila massacre took place between 16 and 18 September 1982, in the course of Israel's occupation of the south of Lebanon and Beirut, when the Israeli Defense Force and a Christian minority right-wing party entered the Palestinian camps and massacred 762 and 3,500 civilians.

<sup>55</sup>On the rapidly developing historiography on Özal's foreign policy doctrine, see: Erkan Ertosun, 'Change and Leadership in Foreign Policy: The Case of Turgut Özal's Premiership in Turkey, 1983–1989', *Mediterranean Quarterly* 27, no. 2, (2016): 47–66; and Sedat Laçiner, 'Turgut Özal Period in Turkish Foreign Policy: Özalism', *USAK Yearbook*, 2 (2009): 153–205.

<sup>56</sup>See footnote no. 26.

Armenian ethnic lobby put forward an initiative to include the 1915 Armenian Genocide at the United State Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) exhibition in Washington DC. Given that most of the funds for the US memorial were based on American public donations, the US federal government launched the 'A Campaign to Remember' <sup>57</sup>. This campaign was a golden opportunity for non-Jewish victims organisations and American Cold War ally governments such as Chancellor Helmut Kohl's in West Germany, who tried to influence the concept of the US memorial exhibition by making financial contributions.<sup>58</sup> Despite a substantial donation (\$3 million) to the memorial by the Armenians based in California, Israel's high-level access to the US administration, and to the US Congress, provided the Turks with the essential aid to block the Armenian initiative. In restorative justice context, the paradox that a country born in large part out of the post-World-War-II sense of the Holocaust was colluding in the denial of recognition of the Armenian Genocide nonetheless did not stop the Israelis and American Jews making sure the USHMM was dedicated to the Jewish victims of the Nazi regime,<sup>59</sup> fostering the 'hierarchy of victimhood', reinforced by the American Jewish militant Holocaust survivors. <sup>60</sup>

From Turkey's point of view, the ever-growing Armenian problem in the capital city of its most important NATO ally – which threatened to showcase Turkey to the US public as perpetrators of genocide side by side with the Nazis crimes – convinced Ankara that Jerusalem is a critically important ally.<sup>61</sup>

Secondly, by 1985 the Armenian terror wave was declining. However, during 1986 two other new set of Armenian fronts had emerged: Armenian Genocide resolutions in the

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<sup>57</sup>For more on the federal initiative 'A Campaign to Remember', see the United States Holocaust Memorial Council report, 12 February 1987, ISA, MFA, 000A4GO, 1.

<sup>58</sup> For more about Helmut Kohl's government attempts to influence the concept of the USHMM, see Jacob S. Eder, *Holocaust Angst: The Federal Republic of Germany and American Holocaust Memory since the 1970s* (New York: Oxford University Press 2016): 84-153.

<sup>59</sup> For more on the Israeli/Jewish paradox, see Eldad Ben-Aharon, 'The Question of "Restorative Justice" in the Context of International Relations: the Israeli Policy on the Armenian Genocide Revisited (1980s-2010s)', in *Just Memories: Remembrance and Restoration in the Aftermath of Political Violence* eds. C. de Gamboa and B. van Roermund (Intersentia Press, forthcoming).

<sup>60</sup> For more about the militant Jewish survivors and the 'hierarchy of victimhood' at the USHMM, see Eder, *Holocaust Angst*, 86.

<sup>61</sup>Eldad Ben Aharon, 'The Geopolitics of Genocide in the Middle East: Israeli-Turkish-American Relations, Ethnic Lobbying, and the Contested Memories of the Armenian Genocide During the Last Decade of the Cold War (1978-1988)' (Ph.D. diss., Royal Holloway, University of London, forthcoming, 2019)

European Parliament (late 1986), and thereby in the US Congress (mid 1987).<sup>62</sup> Once again, as with USHMM, the Israeli pressure on the US Congress to reject the Armenian resolution and prevent a Cold War crisis, compellingly assured Turkey that Israel is its most powerful ammunition against the Armenians, stimulating Ankara to further normalise relations with Jerusalem.

From the Israeli viewpoint, in an oral interview Yitzhak Lior, the former head of the Middle East research department in the MFA (1980–7), assesses the Israeli position on Turkey's decision to normalise relations. He recalls how the change in Turkey's attitude to Israel was viewed by the MFA officials:

For Israel 1985 was a dream coming true. When a Muslim nation such as Turkey approached us, and changed the status of our relations, it had an enormous impact. Ankara sent to Israel one of their best diplomats at the time [Ekrem Güvendiren]. It opened the door for normalisation of our relations. Moreover, it was obvious to us [MFA] that our path to make diplomatic and economic wins, including arms trades etc., goes through their [the Turks'] anxiety that we can help them with the Armenian problem.<sup>63</sup>

To this end, by late 1985 and early 1986 a gradual improvement in relations was evident, subject to several issues concerning the Armenian question. In the context of the fight against international terrorism, Yehuda Milo (the Israeli chargé d'affaires in Ankara during 1985–90) wrote to Jerusalem that Turkey's MFA stated that the recent attacks at Rome and Vienna airports, which wounded and killed innocent bystanders, pointed out the overwhelming extent of international terror. Nothing could justify these terrorist attacks, and Turkey wished to send its condolences to victims of other nations.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, and with respect to Israel's diplomatic efforts to create a niche with Ankara, Milo noted that these terrifying events on New Year's Eve demonstrated once again the acute need for cooperation against terrorism in the coming year, 1986.<sup>65</sup>

Moreover, in January 1986 the Turks agreed to undertake a special symposium of the Israel-Turkish foreign affairs research departments, promising that if this was counted

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<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*; and Christopher Walker, *Armenia: The Survival of a Nation* (London: Routledge, 1980): 380–81.

<sup>63</sup> Oral Interview with Yitzhak Lior, 26 June 2016, Ramat Gan, Israel

<sup>64</sup> Ankara to Jerusalem, re: Turkey/Terror, 29 December 1985, ISA/MFA, 0003BPU

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*

a success then it would help to upgrade diplomatic relations. In Milo's view, the Armenian issue was the trigger for the slight rapprochement with Özal's administration.<sup>66</sup>

This important diplomatic milestone should be further assessed in the context of the Armenian problem, i.e. how the opportunistic Israeli diplomacy during the crisis period, which was characterised by quite intensive Israeli activity against Armenian terrorism, specifically ASALA – but also with other measurements in respect to the Armenian issue mentioned above – would carry into the normalisation period. Namely, these included the 'brothers in arms' approach in the telegrams sent to Turkish diplomats after the Armenian associations, Liel's attempts to broker a rapprochement with the Turks by using the Armenian files during the Lebanon operation, and the efforts to present the Turks with a consistent view that Armenian terrorism had its roots within Palestinian terrorism in Lebanon and was thus a shared concern with Israel. As Milo noted in his document, the Armenian dimension is 'the only strong point we can offer to the Turks right now', which also suggests that the efforts would continue in this direction.<sup>67</sup>

### ***1986: ASALA and the Contested Memories of the Armenian Genocide***

This section engages with the successive findings from the previous sections to tie them together to provide a conclusive answer to Israel's position in respect to ASALA and the contested memories of the Armenian Genocide. In early 1986, after ASALA activity had declined, claims regarding the Armenian Genocide remained an acute problem for the Turks. In this context, another declassified document demonstrates the new scope for Israel's efforts then to prove loyalty to the Turks and to state once again Israel's official position against ASALA. The Israeli chargé d'affaires Yehuda Milo was called to meet Arhan Yigitbasoglu, Turkey's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, due to an Israeli academic publication on ASALA.<sup>68</sup> Yigitbasoglu made the accusation that the authors of the academic paper argued that one of ASALA's critical mistakes was not being selective enough with its targets.<sup>69</sup>

Moreover, Yigitbasoglu alleged that because the publisher was Tel Aviv University, an

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<sup>66</sup>Jerusalem, Re: The Turkish-Israeli Relations, January 1986, 292, 3, ISA/MFA, 000XCSV

<sup>67</sup>ibid.

<sup>68</sup>Anat Kurz and Ariel Merari, *ASALA: Irrational Terror or Political Tool* (Jerusalem: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies and Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985)

<sup>69</sup>Ankara to Istanbul, Re: Turkey-Israel, 27 January 1986, 0003BPU, 1



Israeli state university, and that two members of the editorial committee were Yitzhak Rabin and Mordechai Gur, the publication represented Israel's official stance on the issue of ASALA.<sup>70</sup> Finally, Yigitbasoglu noted to Milo that Ankara believed that Israel was applying double standards in respect to their attitude to ASALA 'that supports the Armenian lies on the alleged Armenian massacre'.<sup>71</sup>

Milo replied that although he had not read the publication thoroughly, Jerusalem cannot accept that the Israeli government is applying double standards in this regard. He stated that Israel held the very firm position that terror is terror is terror, and that there was no difference as to whether this was Armenian or Palestinian terror, and that Ankara was very familiar with Israel's position on this issue.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, Milo explained that Tel Aviv University was a completely independent institution and that some Israeli university institutions published research papers that Israel's government was not pleased with, and the fact that public figures [Rabin and Gur] might contribute their names to public institutions board presses does not demonstrate that the Israeli government was behind these publications.<sup>73</sup> Lastly, Milo then referred Yigitbasoglu to the Israeli efforts in Washington, DC: 'It is also well known to the Turkish MFA our latest and honest actions to help them with the Armenian resolution which clearly reflects Israel's position on this issue.'<sup>74</sup> A few days later, Lior wrote to Milo that according to current academic research in the field of international terrorism, the international support that the Palestinians had garnered despite their terrorist activities demonstrated that other terror organisations, such as ASALA, could be encouraged to carry out attacks in order to gain international recognition of their problems.<sup>75</sup>

To recap, these two documents uncover the continuity between Armenian terrorism becoming a means to encourage the rapprochement of the Israeli-Turkish relations and the continued use of these tropes into the normalisation period. Hence, the Armenian issue as a whole continued to be a source of considerable Turkish concern in the mid-1980s, which thus became a key factor in the normalisation period. Specifically, the

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<sup>70</sup>ibid., 1; Yitzhak Rabin was IDF commander-in-chief, politician and then prime minister (1974 –1977, 1992-1995); Mordechai Gur was also commander-in-chief (1974 –1978) and became a politician.

<sup>71</sup>ibid., 1

<sup>72</sup>ibid.

<sup>73</sup>ibid.

<sup>74</sup>ibid., 2; Ben Aharon, 'The Geopolitics of Genocide'

<sup>75</sup>Jerusalem to Ankara, Re: Your Conversation with Yigitbasoglu-Armenians, 3 February 1986, ISA/MFA, 0003BPR

documents explain how the contested memories of the Armenian Genocide was used by the Israeli and, subsequently, Turkish diplomats during the crisis, and used later as an opportunity to improve their diplomatic relations. The evidence from Milo here connects the various sections of this paper by addressing issues such as Israel's approach to terrorism as a widespread Middle Eastern phenomenon and Israel's work behind the scenes in Washington DC against the Armenian Genocide resolution in the US Congress. Even though the Armenian resolution in Washington DC is worthy of a study of its own, this section shows that Israel's successful attempts to uproot Armenian terrorism from Lebanon, driven by the gradual improvement in the relations between Ankara and Jerusalem (1985–7), encouraged the Turks to put continual pressure on the Israel MFA and Jewish American Organisations in regard to the Armenian issue. This pressure drove Israel and the Jewish organisations to continually prove their 'loyalty' to the Turkish disputed narrative and to intensify their efforts to block the Armenians.

***1987: Normalisation of Israeli-Turkish Relations and Research Forum against Middle Eastern Terrorism***

Thereafter, in mid-1987 the Israeli efforts for a joint Israeli-Turkish endeavour to exterminate Middle Eastern terrorism finally matured. In an extremely secret document signed by Yakov Hadas-Handelsman, Deputy Chief of Mission, Israeli Embassy in Ankara (1986–9), the Israelis and the Turks launched the first symposium between Turkish and Israeli officials from national security research institutes with respect to fighting regional terrorism. Gideon Ben Ami, Israel's former ambassador in Sweden (1994–9) and one of the individuals who managed the Lebanon Middle East department in the Israeli MFA, participated in that symposium. Ben Ami recalls that the aim of such a symposium was for 'comparing notes'. The fact that it took place at all was seen as a big achievement.<sup>76</sup> Daniel Mokady, who also attended, assessed in an oral interview that Israel's relations with Ankara were still at a low ebb in 1986, and that Israel was still seeking to get its foot in the door. In this regard, he noted that Israel had a great deal of leverage over the Turks because it had a lot of information that they did not have. It was extremely important for Israel that the Turks would see the meeting as a great opportunity for them.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>Oral interview with Gideon Ben Ami, 20 October 2016, Jerusalem, Israel

<sup>77</sup>Mokady, 30 October 2016

Moving forward to an overview of the symposium, in the interlocutory notes Hadas-Handelsman writes to Jerusalem and outlines that the Turkish chief of a national security research institute, Eirhan Itabsholu, noted to the participants that the meeting was taking place during a difficult period for the Turks which he [Itabsholu] identified as a crisis for the Turks, due to the European Parliament's decision to adopt the 'Armenian resolution'.<sup>78</sup> According to Hadas-Handelsman, Itabsholu also mentioned that the Turks hoped that this meeting would be established as a professional forum for both Turks and Israelis and would help them to enhance cooperation against Middle Eastern terrorism.<sup>79</sup> The Israeli chief of the national security research institute at the time, Daniel Mokady, stressed that this forum was very important to both countries since 'whether we want this or not, we are both in the same basket'.<sup>80</sup>

Later, the Turkish deputy chief of a national security research institute, Inhal Marshely, addressed the Armenian issue and gave his Israeli colleague a copy of the official Turkish letter handed the same day to the European Parliament in response to the Armenian resolution.<sup>81</sup> Then, Itabsholu proceeded to assess the Armenian resolution and the terror problem; Hadas-Handelsman notes that Marshely expressed the Turks' disappointment about the Armenian resolution since they had failed in their efforts to ensure that the resolution was passed without using the term 'genocide'.<sup>82</sup> The Turks had hoped that they would manage to convince the Parliament to use less provocative words such as massacre, which according to Marshely 'the Turks could have lived with although they were against the term massacre too'.<sup>83</sup>

Hadas-Handelsman notes at this juncture that since the European Parliament had not made the final resolution regarding the Armenian issue, and as this resolution could take a while, the Armenians were disappointed too. Marshely stated that the Turks were now upset and concerned since the Armenians had not yet achieved their goal – i.e. a

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<sup>78</sup>Ankara to Jerusalem, Re: Turkey – Meeting of National Security Research Institute, 29 June 1987, ISA/MFA, 000X44Y, 2

<sup>79</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>80</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>81</sup>*ibid.*, 6

<sup>82</sup>For more detailed discussion on the Israeli diplomats concentrated efforts to block the Armenian Genocide resolution in the European Parliament, including Milo and Lior's accounts, see Eldad Ben Aharon, 'Between Ankara and Jerusalem: the Armenian Genocide as a Zero-Sum Game in Israel's Foreign Policy (1980's -2010's),' *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* (published online 24 November 2017): 1-18.

<sup>83</sup>*ibid.*, 7

genocide resolution – and thus they might renew the terror attacks against Turkish officials.

Furthermore, Hadas-Handelsman reports that Daniel Mokady, the Israeli official, handed to the Turks some Armenian propaganda. At this point, Marshely asked the Israelis if they could provide an update regarding ASALA activity, since they [the Turks] knew that after the Lebanon war (1982–1985) the ASALA facilities in southern Lebanon had been uprooted.<sup>84</sup> Mokady replied to Marshely that before the Israelis came to Ankara he checked with the Israeli intelligence services and could not find any vital information, excluding the Armenian propaganda he had handed over.

In his first-hand account, Daniel Mokady recalls the Israelis' impressions from this symposium that the Turks did not hold any significant information in the field of terrorism. For Israel, it was critical that their head of division said at the end of the meeting, 'let's plan the second symposium'. According to Mokady, the Turks contributed almost nothing to Israel's knowledge.<sup>85</sup>

At this point, Hadas-Handelsman mentioned that the Turks asked about the Armenian community in Israel, and both Daniel Mokady and Gideon Ben Ami stressed that Israeli intelligence did not conduct any kind of tracking of the Armenian community in Israel.<sup>86</sup> In summary, it appears that the 'brothers in arms' agenda, which was driven by the Israelis for a couple of years during the 1980s, eventually paid off.

## Conclusion

With respect to the role of ASALA as a means to a rapprochement in Israeli-Turkish relations, in the Cold War superpower and Middle Eastern contexts a few reflections need to be stressed. First, undoubtedly, there were at least some interconnections between radical Palestinian terrorist groups and ASALA, as demonstrated in various Israeli MFA reports, including close political agendas, but also more practical similarities, such as methods of operation, mutual training faculties in Lebanon, and cooperation in undertaking terrorist activities. These facts made the Israeli thesis regarding ASALA/Palestinian terrorism as a mutual concern with Ankara more

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<sup>84</sup>ibid.

<sup>85</sup>Mokady, 30 October 2016

<sup>86</sup>Ankara to the Jerusalem, 29 June 1987, ISA/MFA, 000X44Y, 2

compelling. This data was used by Israeli diplomats, especially in the early years of the crisis (1982–3) as a diplomatic strategy to influence the Turkish diplomats to change their approach to Israel. Second, although between 1982 and 1983 Jerusalem had failed to persuade Turkey to join a unified front against Middle Eastern terrorism, gradually, from 1985 onwards the consistent diplomatic efforts paid off. This was mainly due to the intensification of genocide allegations against Turkey in several Western international forums, namely the USHMM, US Congress and European Parliament, which were contested by both Israelis and American Jews. These were clearly unfolding during the 1987 symposium against terrorism. Supplemented with the Israeli-Turkish diplomatic rehabilitation, this upturn demonstrates the article's premise that terrorism, and its specific form during the late Cold War and in the Middle Eastern context, could provide a substantial means for diplomatic rehabilitation between two regional and Cold War allies.

All the above cannot be understood unless we consider the late Cold War dynamics in the Middle East. Lundestad's compelling analysis, 'Empire by Invitation?', could describe the Israeli diplomatic engagement with Turkey as 'inviting' the US diplomats to the region to help the Israelis to court Turkey. The article has showcased that the bipolar dynamics of the Cold War could be a two-way street, i.e. according to mainstream historiographical debate of the period in the Middle Eastern context, the dynamics are generally characterised by the 'chewing bone' image of the Americans and Soviets competing for the regional resources and thus alliances with the surrounding countries. Lundestad's analysis has deepened this understanding, demonstrating that regional powers (Israel) can assign the Americans in order to pursue their self-serving regional and diplomatic ends. The Israeli diplomats executed that strategy well in terms of both ASALA and the stagnant relations with Turkey. To recap, as was demonstrated in earlier parts of this article, the Israeli diplomats assigned Haig and Kissinger as respected high-ranking American officials to convey to Ankara that rehabilitation of Israeli-Turkish relations was something the US supported, and that part of this was the unwavering opposition of the US to radical anti-Western terrorism: specifically, Soviet-supported terror (such as ASALA and radical left Palestinian terror organisations).

In conclusion, ASALA's terrorist activity and the way it was used as a means to improve Israeli relations with Turkey also provide a template to understand the Israeli policy towards the contested memories of the Armenian Genocide as they appeared during the late 1970s and 1980s. ASALA should be understood not just as a Middle Eastern Cold War phenomenon but also as a substantial yet overlooked factor, albeit one amongst a few related factors such as the USHMM, the European Parliament and US Congress resolutions, all of which have shaped Israel's treatment of the contested memories of the Armenian Genocide in order to attain similar Cold War diplomatic wins with Turkey.